



Scandinavian Paradise?

To hear the likes of socialist presidential candidate Bernie Sanders tell it, Scandinavia is little less than heaven on earth, a group of peaceful, pluralistic, prosperous societies molded by enlightened democratic socialism. Scandinavians enjoy free and open societies thanks to governments that provide a wide array of social services, including socialized medicine, high educational standards, and every sort of modern amenities, from highways to cheap, environmentally-friendly energy such as wind and solar power. Scandinavian countries, and especially little Denmark, routinely sit atop lists of the “world’s happiest people.” In the UN’s inaugural 2012 “World Happiness Report,” Denmark came in number one, with fellow Nordic countries Finland (number two), Norway (number three) and Sweden (number seven) also in the top 10. The 2015 World Happiness Report has Switzerland in the number one spot, with Iceland, Denmark, and Norway at second, third, and fourth, respectively. Sweden, meanwhile, is number eight. And the United States? Far down the list at number 69, surpassed by the likes of Venezuela, Moldova, Suriname, Saudi Arabia, and Albania. Small wonder that leftists such as Senator Sanders and a plurality of American liberal intellectuals frequently invoke Scandinavian countries as examples of the good that socialism can allegedly do.



Because relatively few Americans have ever been to Scandinavia (there are, after all, few beaches or world-class architectural treasures like those found in more southerly Western European cities), and fewer still speak a Scandinavian language or know anything about their history aside from the fact that the Vikings came from there (NB: the seafaring marauders, not the football team), such claims are seldom challenged in the way that, for example, socialism in Canada or Great Britain is wont to come under frequent criticism.

For this reason, an article such as the *New York Post*’s recent “Sorry, liberals, Scandinavian countries aren’t utopias,” by Kyle Smith, sheds welcome light on the reality of Scandinavian socialism. A review of the brand-new bestselling travel book by British author and longtime resident of Denmark Michael



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Booth, entitled *The Almost Nearly Perfect People*, Smith's piece is a scathing rebuttal of the wearisome claims of socialist Scandinavian superiority.

Exhibit A: Denmark, Booth's home away from home for a decade. Denmark has the world's highest taxes and — according to Michael Booth — one of the world's surliest populaces, as his introductory description of a day in Denmark's workers' paradise makes clear:

In the morning there had been the usual dispiriting encounter with the sullen checkout girl at the local supermarket who, as was her habit, had rung up the cost of my prohibitively expensive, low-grade produce without acknowledging my existence. Outside, other pedestrians had tutted audibly when I'd crossed the street on a green light; there was no traffic, but in Denmark preempting the green man is a provocative breach of social etiquette. I had cycled home to find a tax bill relieving me of an alarming proportion of that month's income, having along the way provoked the fury of a motorist who had threatened to kill me because I had infringed the no-left-turn rule [O]f the fifty or so nationalities I had encountered in my travels up to that point, the Danes would probably have ranked in the bottom quarter as among the least demonstrably joyful people on the earth, along with the Swedes, the Finns, and the Norwegians.

Booth furnishes a veritable litany of complaints about life in Denmark: the high prices, shoddy quality of goods for purchase, suffocating rules, sullen, unpleasant people, and of course, the taxes that consume anywhere between 58 and 72 percent of personal income.

As for Denmark's vaunted healthcare system, notes Smith:

Health care is free — which means you pay in time instead of money. Services are distributed only after endless stays in waiting rooms. (The author [Booth] brought his son to an E.R. complaining of a foreign substance that had temporarily blinded him in one eye and was turned away, told he had to make an appointment.) Pharmacies are a state-run monopoly, which means getting an aspirin is like a trip to the DMV.

Smith points out in the *Post* article an additional disquieting, seldom-acknowledged fact: Denmark, once known for its Lutheran piety, now has legalized bestiality in Copenhagen's "bestiality brothels" (which have been known to advertise their services in newspapers), and it is estimated that at least five percent of all Danish men have had carnal commerce with animals.

This is disconcerting but hardly surprising for those familiar with 20th-century Scandinavian culture. Scandinavian countries were among the first to introduce compulsory sex education and to legitimize the promiscuity that has since engulfed all of the former Christian countries of the West. This is democratic socialism's dirty little secret: It is not only a system of economic mismanagement, but also a vehicle for radical cultural subversion (often known as "cultural Marxism"), under which heading the destruction of traditional sexual mores figures prominently. Abortion, promiscuity, homosexuality, and even baser perversions all find legitimacy in the democratic socialist program.

Beyond Denmark, other Nordic countries have their share of socioeconomic ills. Finland has staggeringly high rates of alcoholism and suicide (50 percent higher than the United States), and its murder rate leads Western Europe. Tiny Iceland, once touted as an economic miracle, turned out to have the mother of all housing bubbles. Sweden's tax rates are second only to Denmark's, and her economy is in terminal decline. Sweden is also experiencing an unprecedented crime wave associated with immigrants from the Middle East.

Only Norway appears to be on an even keel — but Norway, like the Gulf Arab states, Brunei, and



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Venezuela, is the beneficiary of huge oil reserves, which keep money flowing into government coffers.

Booth's chief indictment of Nordic society is that the cultures are cultures of blandness and mediocrity. People do not live in poverty — but neither do they excel, in large measure because the Danes, Swedes, Finns, and Norwegians look askance at non-conformists, outsiders, and risk-takers.

That socialism is viable at all is a testament to the ethnic homogeneity of the Nordic countries and to the high cultural tolerance for uniformity and mediocrity. Even so, Booth's descriptions of sullen clerks, poor-quality groceries, and inefficient public services are reminiscent of the old Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc countries.

In short, the Danes and Swedes are welcome to their socialism, but it would be disastrous for America to try to follow their example.



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